

Water is the Title

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Category: Pretty Little Liars

Genre: Romance

Language: English

Characters: Emily F., Paige M.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2016-04-11 03:44:45

Updated: 2016-04-11 03:44:45

Packaged: 2016-04-27 20:06:37

Rating: M

Chapters: 1

Words: 3,186

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Paige's expectations for the Olympics depend on Emily being able to keep her healthy and other stuff happens too.

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AN: Some of you might be thinking, "What the hell?" Yeah, I forgot the information for this account so I created a new one called SlappyMcSlapperson (which I understand is a terrible name) and posted this story under that account. Then I remembered my info (thanks tumblr) and so I'm moving it here. The story still sucks, it's just under the correct account now. Thank you for your patience and understand during this confusing time of forgotten passwords and screen names.

Oh, and sometimes I think I am funny so it's a sci-fi/western due to that hiccup. Sorry I'm irreverent.

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><p>The heavy drum beats of Dog Days Are Over thumped out the open windows of her silver Toyota as she raced down the street towards the Olympics training facilities. She knew it five in the morning was too early to be listening to her music so loud, probably waking up anyone trying to sleep within a few miles radius, but it was the first day of her new life as the newest physical therapist for Team USA swimming. It was while within her rights to have her music was up, even if the sun wasn't.<p>

She could see the facility off in the distance. Everything that she had work for was happening, seven years of school had lead her to this moment and she couldn't help, but chant, "U-S-A, U-S-A."

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><p>"Hi, I'm Emily Fields, I have a meeting with..." Emily looked up

with wide eyes at the woman gazing at her. Of all the times that her mind could have gone blank, why did it have to be now. She had repeated the name of the woman who was going to be her new boss over and over again in preparation for this day. Emily wanted to make sure that she sounded organized, put together, so unlike how she actually was most of the time. She wanted to make a good first impression and, now, she couldn't even remember one, simple name. "I have a meeting with a Ms. Jessup?"<p>

The woman at the front desk quirked an eyebrow and continued to stare at Emily like she was paint drying on the wall. "Are you asking me if you have a meeting? I think that's something you should know." The woman's voice was low, her words drawn out like she was so utterly bored with Emily's presence and just waiting for someone to carry this front-desk intruder away.

"No, I know," Emily pushed her wind-whipped hair out of her eyes and glanced at the large clock on the wall. Thinking, just for a second, that it was cute how the clock looked like a giant stopwatch. Then she realized, in horror, that she was already ten minutes late and things weren't looking like they were going to improve anytime soon. "I know that I know. I forgot the name of the woman that I'm supposed to meet today, for work, it's my first day. I start work today. I'm a physical therapist and it's my first day." She dropped her overactive hands to her side and sighed in frustration.

The woman behind the frosted glass desk just smirked up at Emily, her bright blue eyes shining. Likely not caring that Emily had a schedule she was obviously late for. "You said that already."

"I did, yes. I'm sorry, I'm just really nervous. Is there a way you could help me out? It's my first day," Emily paused so she could mentally slap herself for saying that again, "right, but you already knew that. Listen, I just really need to speak to Ms...Someone." Twelve minutes late now and Emily was really starting to sweat.

"We don't have anyone here by that name."

Emily glared now at the woman in front of her. This woman, this front-desk overload, was being difficult on purpose, that much was clear. "Obviously, I forgot the name of the person I am meeting with, but I'm already late. If you could, please," Emily strained that word, hoping to convey how annoyed she was, but still wanting to be polite, "tell me who is the head therapist here, then we can both move on with our lives."

"We don't have psychologist here, either."

"What?" She almost made the leap over the counter. "I didn't say I was a psychologist, I said I was a physical therapist."

"You asked for a head therapist."

"No, I asked for the head therapist. The woman who is the head of physical therapy whose name I, unfortunately, can't remember." Emily's knuckles turned white as her fingers gripped the counter. She knew she wasn't making a good first impression with the staff, but she was losing all patience. "Please, I'm begging you, I'm already late."

"Relax, I'm messing with you." The woman at the desk began to laugh as if this had all been a joke that Emily had been in on the whole time. "Ms. Layla Meisner called earlier, she took one of the athletes to go see a specialist this morning and they're running late." She looked down at Emily's still straining fingers and frowned. "So you can ease up on the counter. I'm sure Jonathan, that's our front desk guy, wouldn't like you snapping his workspace into pieces."

Her fingers ached as she eased her grip, but she still didn't feel relaxed. "Why would you do that to me on my first day?" Emily wanted to kick herself for the way her voice sounded, meek and scared. This opportunity was a big deal to her and she wanted to fit in. Not be labeled as the girl who can't take a joke on her first day, but she couldn't help it.

"Ah geez, I'm sorry, sometimes I take joking too far." The woman gathered up a packet and walked around the desk to where Emily was standing. "People are always telling me, 'Sophie, cool it with your pranks. Not everyone knows you are kidding,' but I'm mischievous and sometimes I can't resist." Sophie tucked the packet under her arm and jetting her hand out in Emily's direction. "Sophie Fletcher, I'm another one of the PTs here, so I guess that makes me your co-worker," she said with a bright smile. "I swear I'm a nice person."

Emily smiled at that and took Sophie hand in greeting and, what she hoped, was a truce. "Emily Fields, but I guess you already knew that."

"I did, but it's great to have a reminder. And I think it might be your first day, maybe. Correct me if that's wrong." Sophie was still smiling her toothy grin and Emily decided she liked the way Sophie's smile showed off both rows of teeth.

"You're not wrong."

"Yes, I love being right. Here, this is for you," Sophie said, handing the packet over and putting her arm around Emily's shoulders, leading them out of the lobby. "It has all of your paperwork, insurance crap, 401K, all of the boring stuff. Oh and your I.D. badge, you'll need to put that on now or you might get tasered."

Emily stopped right in her tracks, "this is you joking again, right? Please, tell me people don't get tasered around here."

Then there was that wide smile again and Sophie laughed. "I'm totally kidding. People are not getting tasered around here." She waited until she saw the tension leave Emily's shoulders then continued, "as long as they wear their I.D. badge," she said with a laugh as she ushered them through the double doors into the main training wing. "A warning: people are going to have a field day pranking you when they realize how gullible you are."

"I know." Emily buried her face in her hands and groaned. "I'm not usually this bad, I'm just really nervous. This is a huge deal for me." Emily stuck out her arms and pointed to randomly at everything around them in awe. Portraits of past Olympians were proudly hanging on the wood-paneled walls. Gleaming glass cases displayed trophies, medals, and antique swim gear from back when the greatest advance in

technology to the suits were spandex to keep everything in place. So many champions had walked through these halls and now Emily was a part of it. She was responsible for keeping these people healthy and in the pool. "I mean, look at where we are, team USA. How can I not be nervous?"

Sophie smiled and looked around with Emily, taking in everything through new eyes. "It is pretty amazing. All right, I promise you'll only get straight answers from me for the rest of the day. You're on your own with the rest of the staff, though. And once you get settled in, it's on. I won't fall for that, 'I'm new and amazed and adorable' crap anymore."

Emily turned her head to hide the fact that she was blushing at the "adorable" part. When she looked back, Sophie's clear blue eyes were shining as bright as her smile and Emily realized that she didn't hide her face fast enough. "How many other," Emily paused to clear the hitch in her throat because Sophie was still grinning at her, "how many other trainers are on staff?"

"Well with you being here, we have five now, not including the part-time assistants and the occasional interns we have. Walter and Alex are the other two permanent PTs." Sophie pulled the door to the training room open and waited for Emily to walk through.

"Wow, this place is incredible." Emily took in the state-of-the-art training facility. She had been expecting a smell. The same smell that was in all the training facilities that she had ever been in, that familiar combination of bandages and bleach. The only thing she could smell now, though, was the faint smell of flowers, Sophie's perfume she realized. "How does this room not smell?"

Sophie's laugh was throaty and infectious, making Emily laugh with her. "All of the cleaning products we use here are orderless and organic. We can't have some nasty cleaning chemicals messing up the athletes. The chlorine in the pools are so expertly balanced that it's not an issue, but we wanted to limit their exposure to chemicals."

Emily nodded and looked around. She wanted to take in as much of the room as she could and commit it to memory. She knew that there would be a training period for her, but the sooner she could learn where all the equipment was the better. "Mind if I look around," Emily asked, eyeing some therapy rigs in the corner.

"Help yourself." Sophie lifted herself onto one of the tables and watched Emily touch the wall of resistance band rolls. "We are all really nice here, sort of like a family. Working with the team can get stressful, especially when we get closer to the Olympics. All of the athletes are being pushed to their limit and even the slightest muscle pull can throw their entire training regime off." Sophie smiled as Emily tested the weight of one of the medicine balls, almost dropping it. "As long as the athletes are in the water, we have done our jobs and we can relax."

"How is it," Emily asked. "Working with the athletes, I mean. How are they?"

"Well," Sophie said, jumping down from the table to get closer to Emily, "there are good times and then there are bad time. The thing

to remember is this is their dream. All of their hard work comes down to basically comes down to this blip in the timeline of their life. It's worse for the older athletes because they know they might not have another four years left in them. This is their shot at gold. And we are sort of the last people they want to see because them being in here means they are either injured or trying to keep from getting injured. An injury can destroy everything they've worked for. I'm sure you understand on some level, right?" Sophie stepped back and studied Emily from head to toe. "Let me guess, field hockey?"

Emily shifted under Sophie's gaze. "Dear God, no. One of my best friends in high school played field hockey and she was ruthless, to put it mildly. There is no way I would get on a field with her carrying anything she could use as a weapon." Emily shivered at the thought of Spencer Hastings running around with a club in her hands, terrorizing both opponents and teammates who didn't perform to the Hastings' standard. "I was actually a swimmer until my junior year at Pepperdine."

"You went to Pepperdine? I'm a USC girl, we were practically college neighbors, but USC kicks Pepperdine's ass." Sophie nudge Emily with her shoulder to let her know it was in good humor and they both laughed. "A mid-collegiate career retirement doesn't sound good, though. What happened, if you don't mind me asking?"

Emily shrugged because, in reality, she didn't really know what happened. Why her body had failed her. "My shoulder just had enough, I guess. One day, this little pain started, almost like this little pinch when I extended my left arm over my head. No amount of ice or rest helped." She reached up to rub the spot where phantom pain sometimes lingered. "The pain just kept getting worse and worse, until my doctor sat me down and told me that I was doing irreversible damage to my shoulder if I kept trying to swim."

"How could that be? You would have been, how old, 20?" Sophie's hand replaced Emily's on her injured shoulder started kneading the muscle in gentle circles.

Blush tinted Emily's skin again, but this time she didn't bother looking away from the tender look in Sophie's eyes. "21. It was sort of a blessing in disguise, my life had been all about swimming until that point that I had picked the easiest major I could think of so that classes wouldn't interfere with meets. When this happened, though, I was spending so much time with the training staff that I fell in love with physical therapy."

"For what it's worth, I'm glad you were able to find something you are passionate about outside of swimming." Sophie gave Emily's shoulder a last squeeze and stepped away from her. Moving carts around the room, seemingly making herself look busy.

Sentences scrolled through Emily's mind about things she could ask Sophie. What did she do for fun? Did she play sports? Was she single? That last one being the most important. Everything felt so awkward and forced, though. How had Sophie made conversation so easy and now Emily couldn't even continue the great talk they had been having? "So," she said. It was a start. "Do you -"

"McCullers, on the table."

There was a flurry of activity surrounding the two women who entered in room. Emily recognized Layla Meisner right away and started to walk towards her until she felt a hand on her arm, stopping her.

"That's Layla," Sophie said low enough that Emily was sure the other two women in the room wouldn't hear.

"I know, I was going to go introduce myself."

"Keep your voice down." Sophie pulled her further away from the other women. "Just wait until she's done. She's with McCullers right now."

"Why do you say it like that?"

"Say what like what?" Sophie was still whispering as she moved around the room, distributing supplies onto the carts by the tables.

"You said McCullers like the name leaves a sour taste in your mouth. Do you two not get along?" Emily knew that is was wrong to gossip, but it was such a change in Sophie's demeanor, at least from what Emily had seen so far.

"Dammit, I thought I was getting better about sounding neutral. McCullers is just one of those athletes who are," Sophie paused, tilting her head back and forth as if she was trying to pick the right words, "let's just say she expects excellence from herself and the people around her."

"Is she hard to work with?"

"I've never actually worked on her, but I've seen her interactions with Layla. It's not always pretty." Sophie moved on to the next table slowly getting closer to the other two women in the room. The closer they got the more quiet Sophie's voice got and Emily was having to lean in to hear now. "McCullers is the star, though, probably the greatest female swimmer to come through this facility, so Layla handles all of her treatment."

"Seems weird to say there is a star considering the company."

"I know, but she's like a lady Michael Phelps, corporations are throwing money at her and this facility. She's expected to beat Phelps' record for most gold medals won in a single Olympics."

Emily looked over at the girl grimacing on the table and her heart broke a little at the sight. Emily recognized the stretch that Layla was doing, it was the same stretch she had been put through hundreds of times. "She hurt her shoulder?"

"Yes, but that doesn't leave this room. The media and the sponsors can't find out their star is hurt."

Her gaze moved back to the table where Layla was doing all she could to save this athlete's career. Emily's own shoulder started to ache a little, a sympathy pain, she guessed. This time, though, McCullers was on her side. Her brown eyes, burning with intensity and anguish, locked on Emily's and held them there. Emily wanted to look away, but she was trapped under the weight she felt settling on her chest. Her

heart pounded against her ribs with so much force she thought the whole room would be aware of the noise. Louder and louder it grew until Emily had to catch her breath. Still her eyes remained fixed, glued to this woman.

The feeling of a hand on her arm made her jump. Emily caught the slightest squint in the eyes that had captivated her before McCullers rolled over and sat up.

"Come on, I'll show you the pool and gym. You'll love it."

Emily turned to see Sophie grinning at her again. Her blue eyes dancing with excitement. Emily couldn't help but smile back as she let Sophie lead the way, happy that the weight was gone.

End
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